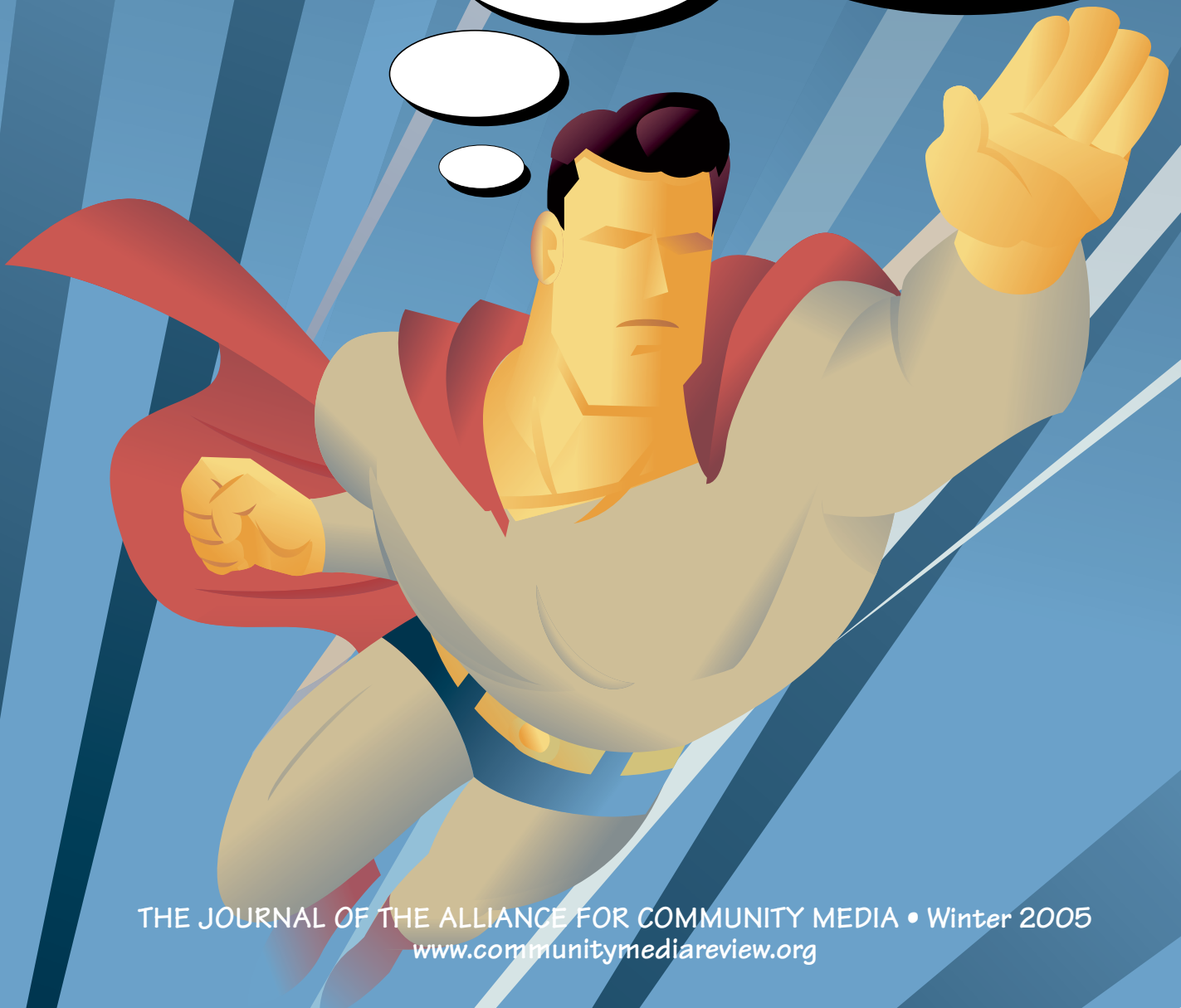


COMMUNITY MEDIA REVIEW

ON BEYOND ACCESS

ON BEYOND ACCESS ...
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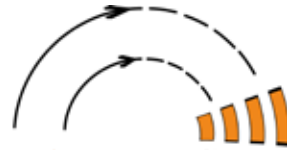
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As the journal of the Alliance for Community Media, *Community Media Review* shall support the Alliance mission by providing: a comprehensive overview of past, present and future issues critical to the Alliance and its membership; vigorous and thoughtful debate on those issues; and a venue for members and like-minded groups to present issues critical to the Alliance.

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The Inevitability of Progress, Part Two

by Anthony Riddle

DID YOU EVER WATCH a sports program, one in which they have a panel of experts arguing, shouting even, about which team was going to win and why? They are absolute in their predictions, “110% positive” of the outcome. The logic is there, backed by stats. They keep a running tally from week to week to show who was right most often. It is very important to us — genetically, almost — to know who predicted right most often. Some people, I guess, even place bets on teams based on the sound reasoning of experts.

And still, the game must be played. Despite all the predictions, the championship is decided by the match of skills, the desire of the players, and the odd bounce of the ball that could never have been predicted — not even by the sure.

In the pages to follow, many of your friends and colleagues are asked to predict the future of community media. Many a bold prediction is made: There is no personal value in making a mundane prediction. At least one, you may determine, is completely off the mark. We should listen, observe the logic, understand the underlying values of the predictor. And we should make our own decisions to shape the future, even more than we are shaped by it.

Much of what follows in this CMR is technology driven discussion. What is it that all these technologies have in common? At their core, they are driven by a vision, or several visions which contradict. At the core of the visions — philosophies. Views of the meaning of the world, the appropriate relationships of the people. We should start from the need in human relationships and design downward from there. What do we need to invent to make those relationships better?

Even in this human-based design model, we must be very careful not to let our desired technological outcome shield us

from unwanted possibilities. Technologies always have unintended consequences. This can be seen in history.

A member of the court came to Memnon with a new invention — paper. “With this new invention, people will be able to write everything down. We will remember everything.”

Memnon shook his head sadly, “When men rely on paper for their memories, they will forget everything.”

Computer networking was promoted as the advent of the paperless office. Look around your own office. I store much of importance electronically. The rest I store in gigantic, leaning towers of paper on my desk — and on the floor beside my desk, and on the file cabinet. I used to type a letter and mail it to a person. Now, I type a letter and email it to a list of thousands. And a good bunch of them print and stack it in a pile beside the trash can.

At home, we often have three computers going at once and have been known to instant message each other from across the room. So much for computing bringing folks together.

The question we must ask of technology is “what do we *want* it to do?” The answer must be found in our set of values. People determine the use of technology, not vice versa. Some people want you to believe there is no control over the future, that it is technologically predetermined. Those who pretend such do so to get you to suspend your power over the future.

It is in your power to say, “*These are the values we have and these are the problems we intend to solve.*” We are not obligated to lay prostrate in front of the scientific, military, business or social desires of experts. They want you to believe that the future is not yours to determine.

The future is yours and only yours. **CMR**



Anthony Riddle is the executive director of the Alliance for Community Media.

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Goggles On

by *Mike Wassenaar*

ON MY THIRTIETH BIRTHDAY, I decided to learn to swim. I grew up in an inner city neighborhood, and as a child I had never spent much time around bodies of water. So learning to swim at that tender age was an empowering act for me. Once I learned to be comfortable in the water, I found swimming was liberating. I'm a bit of a klutz, and underwater I was freed from the awkwardness of gravity for the first time in my life. Backstroke, breaststroke, crawl, and treading water were all new to me at first. Over time, I came to be comfortable with different methods of moving around in the water.

At about the same time, I began working in community media, first in community radio at a station in Wisconsin. Several years later, I found myself working in community television in the Twin Cities. Like falling in love with the backstroke, I fell in love with working with people in community media. They taught me about how media technologies can be used to help people tell their story, find their voice, and change their world. Each media form has a common end: to empower people to use electronic media to strengthen our communities. But, of course, community radio and television have radically different ways of getting there.

Given all that, I am thinking about the backstroke as I look at this issue of CMR, and wonder about getting "Beyond Access." If access television is an end in itself, a tool for a specific purpose, I wonder about getting "beyond" it. My swimming instructors never said to me, "You've perfected the crawl. Well done. Now move beyond it so you can butterfly." I know that's an absurd example, but I'm using it to illustrate a point about ends and means, about goals and methods.

It's a pretty common mistake to misrecognize methods for ends. We seem to do it a lot when it comes to social practices and technology. And I see it all the time

when I talk with people about community television and access television. There's a persistent metaphor in our language in the US of breaking with the past, or of millennial revolution, when we talk about changing technology and changing social forms. Drop the old, embrace the new. The future is coming, ready or not. It will change us forever.

We have an active choice to make in constructing methods to help our communities, in choosing our history, regardless of how technology changes. I would argue that access television is a specific tool, crafted during a specific time in US history. Sort of like a plow. I know many communities that find the tool of access television developed over the last 30 years useful. I want to suggest that as new media technologies continue to develop, community media practitioners like you and me should be developing complementary tools and practice that make a difference in the lives of our communities.

And of course, there are many practitioners in community television for whom access television is the end *and* means. If you're one of these people, I want to invite you to look at this issue and think about the possibilities for your community that lie ahead as the future arrives at our doorstep everyday.

Now it's off to the future. I've got my goggles on. Let's dive in! **CMR**



Mike Wassenaar is executive director of Saint Paul Neighborhood Network, and is the chair of the National Board of the Alliance for Community Media.

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What the Heck Does That Mean Anyway?

by Kari Peterson & Mike Kroes

INTERESTING TIMES WE FIND OURSELVES IN, NO? Many before us, especially philosopher types, have pondered change — the havoc it wreaks, the ways we adapt to it, and how we evolve. For those of us working in technology fields, change is a regular part of our reality. But today's technology changes are not just about garden-variety format switches. No, the technology changes we're talking about here are radical shifts in the ways we make, deliver, and consume media. And in addition to technological changes, we're dealing with earth-shattering legislative and regulatory changes, their impacts on our funding, and a sea-change in how the whole world relates to media. That's a lot of change going on.

In this issue of Community Media Review, we do three things:

First, in order to prepare for a changing world, we get grounded. We've asked four long-time practitioners in our field to help us define our core values, so that as we move forward to meet change head on, we carry with us a mission that is so solid and so unflinching, we feel armed and ready, and we say, "Bring it on!"

Second, we take a closer look at those change factors described above. We make the case that, indeed, this is a seriously changing world for us in community media and it is time to reevaluate our operations and services in response.

Finally, we ask, "How?" Acknowledging that change is a reality, and comfortably armed with a set of core values and a clear sense of purpose, we ponder our next steps. What should we be thinking about? We've asked our colleagues — from first-generation access pioneers to Millennial generation practitioners — to offer perspectives on the way forward and help us to see our path to the future.

We believe this is a time like no other. We believe it's a make or break time for PEG and community media practitioners. We believe it's a time for taking a hard look at ourselves and a careful look down the path to see just how we are going to ensure that the mission of community media is served. Ours is an important mission,

critical to a thriving democracy and vibrant culture. We must be prepared to continue our good work well into the future.

We encourage you to read this issue cover-to-cover as we look at who we are, where we are, and ponder where we might be going. We invite you to visit the new Community Media Review website (communitymediareview.org), where we offer links to additional resources and venues for your input and dialogue. Together we move forward to a world "beyond access." **CMR**



Mike Kroes got his start in media back when they really did "cut" film — physically — and put it back together with glue or tape. Work in the commercial broadcast world, and owning a video production studio, led to graduate work in film and video at Columbia College in Chicago with documentary film as an area of expertise. Mike ran the Community Activities program at a large U.S. Navy base in Japan where he oversaw

the Community Education program, ran two film theaters, edited the Community Activities section of the local (US) newspaper, and found that civilians do not always think like military people. He is now the coordinator of tctv2 in Traverse City, Michigan, which entails another kind of community education.

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Kari Peterson works as an independent consultant on projects related to examining and articulating the future of community media, and helping PEG and CMCs move gracefully into that future.

She was the founding executive director of Davis Community Television in California and served in that capacity for over 20 years, through many technological and philosophical transitions, including its long-time partnership with Davis Community Network (an internet-based nonprofit media organization), its recent cable franchise renewal negotiations, and the start up of its low power radio station (KDRT).

Kari has served on the national ACM board, the Western Region board, and numerous national and regional committees.

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Section I. The Mission That Drives Us

INTRODUCTION: WHY WE ARE HERE

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT CHANGES are occurring on numerous fronts that will fundamentally affect the world of community media. These changes are leading us to re-examine how our centers operate now, and contemplate new ways of operating in the future.

As we prepare to evolve our operations in response to these changes, it is important to look inward. What is fundamentally at the core of a community media center? What drives us in our work as community media practitioners? What is our role, our purpose, and our mission? In this section, we reconnect with our core values and with the mission of community media.

Why take time to revisit our mission? Because if we do, and we agree on a set of common values, it can serve as a touchstone as we evaluate our role in a changing world. With a solid, unflinching core mission, we are better able to contemplate evolution of our existing operational models even as we move forward into a future

of new media tools, new delivery platforms, and new services. We feel ready to adapt to change without compromising our values.

What are the elements of that mission and how does that help us define our role going forward? Articles in this section examine those elements. First, **Laurie Cirivello** looks at our mission as it relates to our role as a facilitator in telling, sharing and preserving our communities' stories. **Felicia Sullivan** looks at our role as educator, community organizer, convenor, cultural facilitator, advocate, content guide, audience broker, information center and communication resource provider. **Greg Boozell** emphasizes our role in facilitating civic engagement and speech that matters. And finally, **Fred Johnson** presents a chart that characterizes our mission in terms of empowerment derived from alternative infrastructures and tools, competency and literacy, community building, and alternative content. **KAP**

Back to the Future ... Access Style

by *Laurie Cirivello*



Laurie Cirivello is the executive director of the Community Media Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. GRMC is a multi-faceted media center offering cable television access, community radio, computer networking, media literacy analysis and training, and a live historic theater venue.

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THERE'S PLENTY OF TALK about the need for community media to change and move forward if it is to survive. Many of us share concerns about how to embrace new technologies and communication trends. We fear erosion of funding, loss of leadership, and diminished local control over rights-of-way. How can our organizations evolve to meet these challenges? What new and exciting opportunities exist for community media to ensure a vibrant future?

As we scatter in every direction looking for the answers, I suggest that the first step needs to be a big step backward — back to our roots, and back to our purpose.

At last summer's national conference in Monterey, I took a break from sessions and went to the loft at the theater across the street. There I sat with George Stoney, our oft-referenced "father of com-

munity media." We watched video and talked about storytelling, and the impact it has on individuals and community. He shared grainy, black and white documentary work — shot over 30 years ago. I shared a number of full-color, digitally produced shorts. There were decades between our productions and a huge difference in tools used. But more striking, were the similarities. They were all small stories of real people. Stories that resonate with the most human aspects of our beings — struggle, passion, hope and community.

From early endeavors in community media, the "why" was to ensure that as individuals and communities, we are able to tell, share and preserve our own stories, understand our differences, discuss our challenges, encourage the exchange of ideas, and develop solutions using com-

“Community media’s best chance at survival will be when our identity is inextricably woven into the work and identities of those we serve.”

munication tools of the day. It is the core belief that democracy can only thrive when information flows freely to and from many diverse sources. And that everyone deserves the right to be part of the conversation.

The “why” is not, however, the tools we use. Our mission never once speaks of the conversion from analog to digital or web casting or even franchise fees.

In our rush to save our centers and to reinvent ourselves to remain valid, I sometimes fear that “mission” has taken a back seat. And, instead, we allow (even encourage in some cases) our tools and methods to define us.

Take the young 20-something who doesn’t have cable. He’s a netflix guy. He has a robust presence on MySpace, he blogs and vlogs and downloads his favorite podcasts. He makes 30-second movies on his cell phone. He’s truly an on-demand kind of guy. Does he recognize his place in the most common identities of community media? Or does he recognize the access center only as a quirky TV station on a cable system he doesn’t watch?

If the truth is more often the latter, then we need to step back and address this most basic issue. *Our mission must be clearly spoken and recognized in all we do, as it is precisely in the mission that we find the most hope for the future of community media.*

At a time when fewer voices are invited into the conversation, our mission should stand as a beacon for all who care about this disturbing trend. At a time when new, fledgling communication methods entice our young people, our experience in preserving the individual voice can offer support, context, and guidance. At a time when communities are mourning the loss of their identities, we can help them preserve their stories and celebrate their uniqueness. As our local leaders are losing their authority to “one size fits all” telecom legislation, community media can, and must, provide current informa-

tion, political ammunition, and constituent support. We must be problem solvers, leveraging all the tools at our disposal to create solutions that address the work of the community. We must find and remove barriers to open and diverse communication of all types.

Community media’s best chance at survival will be when our identity is inextricably woven into the work and identities of those we serve. It is not the job of the community to get to know community media; it’s our job to know our communities. We must become a vital support to the priorities of local residents, neighborhoods, organizations, schools, city governments, and that 20-something young man. When we know and serve their needs, accessible community media becomes part of them and what they do. Thus, we help them to determine the value of community media in the context of their lives, their community, and their world.

As we know, local access TV can be a tough sell to cash strapped and tech weary decision-makers. But media democracy, communication as a human right, and the value of local voices are timeless values.

A big step back should be our next collective step forward. Regardless of changing technology, funding issues and political challenges, it has always been, and always will be, in our mission that we find our true relevance and purpose. **cMr**

“It’s simple. Regardless of the tools of the day, our relevance and value are unquestionable, as long as we understand and stick to our missions.”

*Karen Toering
Reclaim the Media*

Everything Old is New Again

by Felicia M. Sullivan



Felicia M. Sullivan, via Forge Consulting, promotes open communication networks within community environments. Her current work — using media to link local endeavors to regional and national community capacity-building resources — is centered in Lowell, MA.

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rad·i·cal (ră-dī-kəl) adj.

1. Arising from or going to a root or source; basic

THE PACE OF INNOVATION is quickening. New methods and forms for creating and distributing content bombard us every day. As is often the case with information and communication technologies, new tools bring so much energy and hype that it is easy to get caught up in the euphoria (and fear) of change. It is easy to believe that great good or great evil is around the corner. Yet the challenge for community-based organizations remains the same: How do we best meet our missions? Can we bring improvement and growth to our communities? Will the lives of the people we serve be enriched? Can we leverage the powerful tools of communication for education, development, justice, and the benefit of the public good, rather than for profit and commercial gain? Are we able to create a more vibrant public discourse and, by extension, a healthier democracy?

As community media centers reach beyond the traditional access model and engage in new forms and methods of communication, the root source and basic foundations of the community media movement must be the vital energy fueling our work. This “radical” approach is one that exists from the movement’s birth:

“With a firm understanding of why we exist and who we serve, the choices we make about technologies will be saner and more focused toward community ends rather than technological ones.”

The rationale for public access television was that, as mandated by the Federal Communications Act of 1934, the airwaves belong to the people, that in a democratic society it is useful to multiply public participation in political discussion, and that mainstream television severely limited the range of views and opinion. Public access television, then, would open television to the public, it would make possible community participation, and thus would be in the public interest of strengthening democracy.¹

The roots of community media are solidly planted in the idea that access is provided to allow our citizens to participate in a democratic society and to affect and engage in decision-making that benefits all in our community. It is this role in supporting and growing public discourse that is most vital to our future. When interviewed about the influence of the internet on access, public access founding father George Stoney stated, “It’s getting the attention of a lot of people but it doesn’t replace the need for group action, ... So much of the internet is individual stuff.”²

So many of the new tools and communication networks are based in exactly this realm of individualized use — both consumption and production. More than ever, community media centers need to lead our communities in thinking about how best to leverage these tools for community purposes. What is our role in creating citizens, not

1 www.museum.tv/archives/etv/P/htmlIP/publicaccess/publicaccess.htm

2 www.indyaccess.org/video-library/media-issues/george-stoney/

consumers? How do we marry the old technologies of radio and cable television with new forms such as blogs, podcasting, social networking software, and personal media devices (i.e., iPods)? How do we confront the increasing fragmentation of audience and the demands for interactivity and flexibility from our producers?

Looking back at the public role we have and continue to play within our communities gives us the best foundation for moving forward. With a firm understanding of why we exist and who we serve, the choices we make about technologies will be saner and more focused toward

community ends rather than technological ones. These roles which transcend technology are varied and include things such as educator, community organizer, convenor, cultural facilitator, advocate, content guide, audience broker, information center, and communication resource provider.

So who out there is leveraging the new to support the old? Below are some examples of organizations and projects (many of which are not traditional PEG access centers) that provide some model of what the possibilities are as we move forward. **cMr**

USING THE NEW TO SUPPORT THE OLD

APPALSHOP'S FRONT PORCH PROJECT

An interactive, online multimedia database that documents, records, and shares profiles of traditional musicians in the central Appalachian region.

www.appalshop.org/frontporch

BAY AREA VIDEO COALITION

A range of educational opportunities that place media training within the context of workforce skill building.

www.bavc.org/classes

MassIMPACT

Bringing people together for the purposes of idea exchange, experience sharing, collective thinking, proactive planning, and applied innovation to educate and empower communities across Massachusetts.

www.massimpact.org

ACTION COALITION FOR MEDIA EDUCATION

Seeking to transform the way media is consumed and understood through education.

www.acmecoalition.org

IBRATTLEBORO

A local news source by and for the people of Brattleboro, Vermont, published continually in the spirit of citizen journalism.

www.ibrattleboro.com

NODE101

A growing community of videobloggers on a quest to convene new sorts of spaces for makers whose end product might not be cable television.

www.node101.org

POV

Creating a proactive approach to creating audience share and community buy-in without ignoring the need for a solid bottom line.

www.pbs.org/pov

BRAVE NEW FILMS

Challenging the way in which production and distribution of media happens.

www.bravenewfilms.org

YOUTH MEDIA RIGHTS

Linking marginalized youth with media education to affect social change.

www.youthmediarights.org

“More than ever, community media centers need to lead our communities in thinking about how best to leverage the use of these tools for community purposes. What is our role in creating citizens, not consumers? How do we marry the old technologies of radio and television with new forms such as blogs, podcasting, social networking software and personal media devices (i.e., iPods)?”

Determined Media: On Technomania, the First Amendment and Being Heard

by Greg Boozell



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[This is an excerpt of the original article. For the full text, go to communitymediareview.org and follow the links to Greg Boozell's article in the CMR archive.]

READING THE BUSINESS HEADLINES, it's a challenge to assuage feelings of anxiety when facing the wholesale changes heralded to be occurring in media. Even keeping up with the jargon can be daunting as we work in a field rife with acronyms and lingo: VoIP, podcasting, POTS, streaming media, HDTV, blogosphere, push media, broadband, DV, VOD, telco, and on and on.

No doubt technology is important, but it's not of central importance to this discussion. Our work in community media has as much to do with politics and civic life as it does with cameras or computers.

To gain perspective, it might be useful to first look to history. In the early 19th century, English weavers organized and fought against mechanization adopted by budding industrialists which threatened the workers' well-being. Naming their movement after the mythical Nedd Ludd, these Luddites went from mill to mill, smashing the machinery that threatened to destroy their livelihoods. Today, the term "Luddite" is mistakenly used in a pejorative manner against those who oppose technological change. The point of the movement was not to oppose technology, but rather to insist that technology serve the ends of those directly affected and that it not undermine the interests of their communities.

There are parallels in our work today. The heart of political advocacy for access television, and other community media initiatives, rests in the demand that media and its technologies address interests beyond the needs of consumer capitalism. We demand that these technologies be put in the service of communities and people in order to build a more just society. Decades of access television have shown us many examples of innovative uses of video and cable technology which

build active citizenship in communities, flying squarely in the face of television's predominant cultural role as atomizer of the public into disconnected, compliant consumers.

But as stewards of these stations and CMCs, we need to continue to push our understanding and expectations of our centers. While changes in technology or federal policy may alter how access and CMCs operate, a reappraisal of how we interpret and apply the mission of access in our communities could result in even more far-reaching change.

The First Amendment continues to be the cornerstone for access television and other community media organizations. Content neutrality accompanied by institutional passivity which privileges autonomous speech is a commonly accepted First Amendment tenet of the access mission. I would argue, however, that an organizational philosophy rooted solely to support autonomous free expression severely limits the benefit an access station or CMC might offer to a community. Instead, devoting resources to innovative processes which help constitute effective public engagement in the community can reposition a center as a local hub for civic life.

This isn't to say that some access stations don't pursue this tack already. Many stations initiate, produce and televise local candidate forums during election seasons. Access outreach programs regularly target important speakers in the community who haven't yet participated. I'm recommending that we build on these kinds of approaches and be willing to provide resources above and beyond the norm to ensure that participation and programming adequately reflects critical but often under-represented people and issues.

In addition to the first-come, first-

served model, a variety of proactive approaches has been taken at Chicago Area Network TV.

These include targeted on-site training programs, staff-produced programming, and a menu of services exclusively designed for nonprofit organizations. Relatively inexpensive digital camcorders and computer-based editing have also made long-term equipment loans to community organizations a practical reality.

Expanding training curricula to broaden training programs beyond basic equipment operations to encompass broader community-based media campaign strategies could also be very useful. Coupling access television with internet communications tools is quite promising in this regard. Creating local advocacy programming tied to a strong web component can be very effective. This could include on-line discussion during or fol-

“In the end, the media or technology used will not matter as much as our ability to innovate and adapt its use to ways that serve citizens and help build strong communities. Focusing the access mission, proactively fostering public dialogue, and enabling meaningful speech increases the relevance and value of access stations and CMCs.”

lowing a telecast, re-purposing access video for web distribution, or using an email advocacy service like citizenspeak.org in conjunction with access programs.

In the end, the media or technology used will not matter as much as our ability to innovate and adapt its use to ways that serve citizens and help build strong communities. Focusing the access mission, proactively fostering public dialogue, and enabling meaningful speech increases the relevance and value of access stations and CMCs. **cMR**

COMMUNITY MEDIA MISSION AND MEDIA LITERACY

WE CANNOT HAVE A CONVERSATION about the community media mission without talking about media literacy. Indeed, as the vital link between our communities and technology, we must assume the responsibility of teaching people to understand the powers and the abuses of media. It's not enough simply to provide tools and teach their use. Media use and media savvy go hand-in-hand. Our mission — now, and going forward into whatever technology realm awaits us — includes our role as trainers in the cultural ins and outs of media making and media consumption.

Belinda Rawlins and Jeff Smith, co-editors of the Summer 2005 issue of Community Media Review, argued this point well:

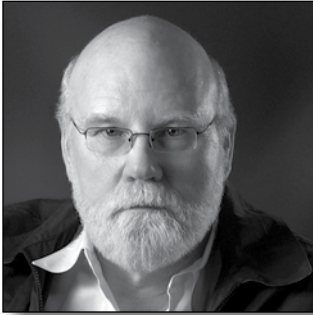
Jeff — Media literacy should be taught and practiced for the benefit of social change, but too often that is not the case. Media literacy has often been presented as a neutral, dispassionate educational methodology. For me, as someone who comes out of a community organizing background, media literacy is just another tool in being an effective organizer for social change.

Belinda — Frequently in PEG access centers, training provided to aspiring media makers focuses on simply the technical act of making media. I believe that access training is failing our communities by not teaching the critical thinking skills implicit in the definition of media literacy — the ability to consume and create media critically. A media literate access producer will do so much more for their causes, community and access center if you can help them to develop these skills.



Framing a Community Media Mission for a Networked Culture

by Fred Johnson



Fred Johnson is a documentary maker and teacher. He directs the Community Media and Technology program at UMass Boston's College of Public and Community Service, www.cpcs.umb.edu/cmt. He is a founding member of Media Working Group, Inc. www.mwg.org.

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[Please visit www.newcommunitymedia.org for information about this study and related activities.]

IN WINTER 2005, the Community Media and Technology program at UMass Boston joined the Benton Foundation in a collaborative study of community media practices in this moment of intense political and technical media change. The study aims to understand community media as a coherent set of common values and practices. This is not an academic exercise; Karen Menichelli, my partner in the work at the Benton Foundation, and I both have a strong sense that now is an urgent time to begin imagining and visioning the profusion of “place-based” media as one community media sector. The study considers community as it exists geographically as well as virtually, but acknowledges that they are two completely different kinds of community. We are examining place-based media as a vital part of the work of community media.

We are finding in the course of the study that community media is, what John Downing in his book *RADICAL MEDIA*, calls a “fuzzy concept,” one that when pushed too hard toward precise definition has a tendency to disappear in a fashion similar to looking too closely at a news print photo until it appears to be only meaningless light and dark dots. But we are finding that when standing at just the right distance some important things come clearly into focus. The chart on the facing page is one of those focused places. All community media, when at all successful, are about empowerment. Nearly all community media carry out the mission of empowering citizens and communities through four key strategies and ac-

tivities: (1) access; (2) media competency and literacy; (3) community building; and (4) the creation of alternative content.

“There is a shrieking gap between the current reality of our media system and the potential of media in this networked era to deliver social benefits. Surely community media is a significant solution to that problem.”

It is strategically timely and politically urgent to begin understanding and acting in ways that allow these areas of “empowerment” to converge culturally across converging media platforms, disparate funding, and a variety of institutional settings. What we need to visualize, construct, and act on is a common community media culture. That means examining the relationships between community media organizations and their communities and, perhaps more importantly, between community media organizations and other community media organizations [it might be time to consider imitating corporate America and begin ceaselessly merging into entirely different media organizations — aggregating our resources for greater effect and impact]. As we look at the potential transformation of media, we look for a media environment that embodies diversity, dialogue, civic engagement and local empowerment, and rejects the simple notion that media have only commercial communication value. There is a shrieking gap between the current reality of our media system and the potential of media in this networked era to deliver social benefits. Surely community media is a significant solution to that problem. **cMr**

Community Media Empowerment Strategies

All Community Media, Art, Information and Technology initiatives feature a creative mix of empowerment strategies.

*Prepared by Fred Johnson,
Community Media and Technology program, College of Public and Community Service*

Empowerment	Activity	Approach	Infrastructure or Venue Focus
Access: Alternative infrastructure and production tools	Making available media production tools, computers, television distribution, internet, software, community communications infrastructure, meeting space, web servers	Democratic, citizen access to communications tools and dissemination infrastructure	Cable, broadband, municipal telecom, internet, wi-fi, wimax, local and public service broadcasting
Competency/Literacy: Media Literacy, Information Literacy, Digital Literacy, and Cultural Literacy	Media arts and aesthetic education, learning to gain a civic voice in a media culture, articulation of media biases, media and politics, political engagement, understanding commodity culture, parenting in a media saturated home	Intervention or challenge to the complex manipulation of symbols and culture for purposes of domination, exploitation and tyranny by power holders	All mass media, print and electronic; emerging commercialization of the interactive potential of digital media through cable, broadband, internet and wireless
Community Building	Workforce training and skill building, micro enterprise development, business infrastructure development	Community organizing, participatory planning, democratic economic development, workforce and infrastructure development	Local media, municipal telecom infrastructure, computer and technology incubators and tech centers
Alternative Content	Creation of video, audio, film, web sites, internet-based citizen media, P2P, media blogging, social networking software, data bases and print production	Content positioned to counter or supplement mass media content and "official information"	All platforms, with an increasing expansion, mutation and innovation within IP networks and cross platform production and dissemination, disruptive info tech

Section II. The Challenges that Confront Us

INTRODUCTION: PEG IN A CHANGING WORLD

LIKE IT OR NOT, ready or not, there are a number of factors that will cause you to reassess the services you are providing, your relationship with your local government and community, and your relationship with your users. We'll take a look at three interrelated factors that we see as major forces for change in PEG paradigms. Any one of these fundamentally impacts our work in community media. Taken as a whole, there is definitely a need to sit back, take a deep breath, and think about what it is you really do, and why, and how.

These forces for change are technology, government, and culture.

Technological changes that are already, or soon will be, affecting your life include: the shift from analog to digital; the convergence of formerly distinct and separate information delivery systems into one (video, data, and voice are now all delivered via broadband); and the ongoing shift from a cable "video" service infrastructure to an internet platform. And important for us, who've been long situated within a cable television construct, the shift to digital technology and the emergence of the internet as a delivery platform has resulted in radically new opportunities for making, distributing and consuming media.

These technological changes, among other forces, are bringing about new legislative initiatives that will (or have) caused regulatory and policy changes that the PEG world is still trying to understand and come to terms with. We are all very aware of the intense push for a national franchising plan by the telcos that will immediately upon passage change our relationship to our local community and affect our funding (no one seems to know exactly how, but everyone knows that it will). Some of us have experienced a new emphasis on institutional connectivity infrastructure which is diverting funding from basic PEG services. Some of us have seen cash-strapped local governments simply say, "what's in it for us?" as they slash funding for PEG centers.

What may be the most important change washing over us, however, is cultural. The Millennial Generation has a fundamentally different relationship to media, and the tools of media, than some of the folks who currently run access centers. Today's 20-somethings are media savvy and connected to their tools; they make media work for them on their own terms. Not satisfied with consuming media on someone else's schedule, they capture and time-shift. They are always connected to their communities, however they define them (is a community strictly "local" any more?) and they can immediately access their

favorite blogs, vlogs, text messages, and voicemails. They can make video on their cellphones. They can download your video (which you may have provided under some new copyright scheme to allow others to use your stuff in ways you specify), manipulate it, add to it, participate in it, and send it on to others. Are these the people who will be content to make a traditional video program and have you play it back on your cable system a few times and be done with it? These are the people who are making their own media — immediate and personal and meaningful to them — with their own equipment, and bringing it to you as one small part of their overall distribution strategy.

The following articles deal with these issues in more depth. First, **Sean McLaughlin** takes a look at the shifting regulatory and legislative environment. **Steve McMahon** takes a look at the franchise renewal process in his area, and how the changing environment that we have been describing prompted new approaches to the renewal process. Remember that this is past tense; Steve's experience with franchise renewal is just the beginning. Then we take a look at an excerpt from NAMAC's DEEP FOCUS: A REPORT ON THE FUTURE OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA, written by **Andrew Blau**, for commentary on the shifting cultural media world. Finally, **Kenyatta Cheese** examines the larger picture and explains how technological advances are driving changes that will affect you. Be sure to take a look at the other guides we've prepared for you, too. We point to resources to track some of the most significant recent legislative and regulatory changes that will affect you, and we've also pulled together some interesting factoids and tidbits about the Millennial Generation's relationship to their media world.

Taken as a whole, the articles in this section contain no answers. Rather, they describe some new developments that you should be aware of and thinking about. No one knows where change will take us, but the articles here can help you construct a framework for considering this new media environment. The next generation, and generations beyond, will still need help building community, meeting and discussing issues, finding their voice and expressing their thoughts about their world and how it could be better. Use these articles to increase your awareness of coming trends, and to inform your thinking about how you will fulfill your mission, and even what your role is in the new scheme of things, and you will go far toward being important, relevant and useful in the new media world. **MAK**

BE INFORMED. BE PROACTIVE. PRESERVE COMMUNITY MEDIA.

IN THIS ISSUE OF CMR, we are not specifically detailing the status of current telecommunications policy, changes in federal and state legislation, or changes in regulatory enforcements; changes are occurring too quickly for us to report accurately. For our purposes here, suffice to say, the sands upon which we stand are shifting. This fact requires us to remain vigilant and well-informed.

A telecom environment in constant flux is a fact of life. Legislative and regulatory changes do not happen in a vacuum, however; they arise out of change occurring in other realms, which is why we never seem to stand still. Technological development drives changes in media making, delivery, and consumption. New behaviors and new ways of doing things prompt changes in business practices, business models and economic constructs. This may have vast societal and cultural impacts, which inform policy discussions, leading to legislative debate and reform, new laws, new relationships, and so it goes.

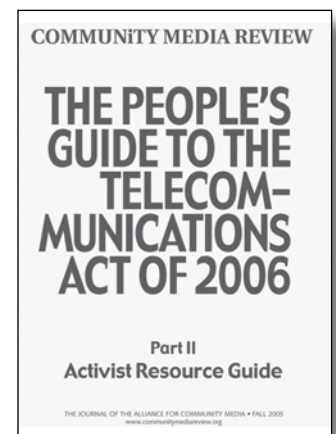
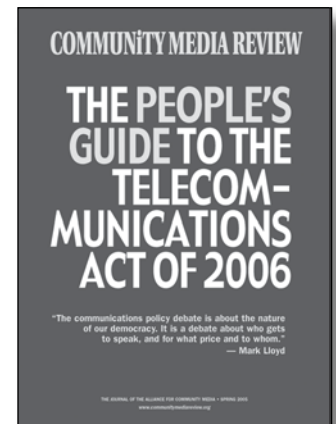
And really, even if it requires a cadre of educated economists and political theorists to figure all that out, we can all

probably agree that technology, economics, legislation and regulation are an ever evolving reality, especially when mixed with power, money and politics. And it impacts us. It challenges us. It threatens us. And therefore, it requires that we stay informed and engaged at all times.

To that end, we provide two excellent resources, which, in turn contain myriad useful, invaluable resources. Both are recent issues of the Community Media Review, both compiled and edited by Lauren-Glenn Davitian:

- The People's Guide to the Telecommunications Act of 2006, Part I
- The People's Guide to the Telecommunications Act of 2006, Part II, Activist Resource Guide

Keeping these guides handy is essential to remaining informed. They provide resources and the tools necessary to be proactive and effective in our collective and ongoing battle for media access. They can be found at communitymediareview.org.



“The most important work of community media workers is the protection of free speech and public access. We cannot assume that these principles are safe. In fact, the constitutional assumptions of free speech and regulatory protections of open access are under siege — today more than ever. If we are not able to mobilize people power to protect our rights and privileges, they will be erased by the interests of giant media companies who influence Congress with their large campaign contributions. If we, as community media workers, do not understand that advocacy is the first and most important part of our job description, we are out of business. And worse than this, democracy will unravel on our watch.”

Lauren-Glenn Davitian

The Changing Regulatory and Legislative Framework: From Community Investment to Corporate Profiteering?

by Sean McLaughlin



Sean McLaughlin serves as public policy chair for the Alliance for Community Media. In his spare time, he runs a local advocacy organization — Hawaii Consumers — and explores tropical wilderness.

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[N.B. While parts of this article are derived from ACM policy documents, it is not an official statement of ACM. The author acknowledges the work of many others in forming these ideas — especially Herb Chao-Gunther, Andrew Schwartzman, Mark Cooper and Anthony Riddle.]

Our current communication landscape is dominated by giant corporations. Perhaps the defining characteristic of communications media in our time will be the constant consolidation of media ownership into fewer and fewer controlling hands and the subsequent demise of diversity and localism. And nowhere is the dominant influence of private profit-making more evident than in the lobbying efforts of big media and telecom corporations before elected and appointed officials.

In principle, the current regulatory framework is meant to provide a system of checks and balances involving federal, state and local jurisdictions. Laws and ordinances enacted by elected officials in Congress, state legislatures and local city, county and town councils are implemented by appointed regulators at the Federal Communications Commission, state utility commissions, and diverse local agencies, commissions and boards.

This framework supports three basic policy pillars: competition, diversity, and localism.

Ironically, a key industry argument today is that the costs of lobbying so many different jurisdictions is putting a crimp in corporate profits! According to this argument, media regulation should be federalized, with state and local authorities effectively preempted from media regulation of any kind. Without the burden of answering to all those pesky local communities, industry hacks argue that they will be free to focus on profitability and increased private investment thereby delivering new advanced services more expeditiously. In the corporate world view, private profit is the ultimate good, media are commodities, and regulation should serve media owners.

Countering industry's push for more

profits are those who see media as a social good — giving people a voice in decisions that affect their lives, sharing diverse aspects of culture, and building communities. In the public interest view, communications media are social infrastructure — essential public resources like water, streets and schools — worthy of community investment. Regulation of media corporations for consumer protection, fair compensation for use of public property, local non-commercial access, and other purposes should serve to maximize the public good.

An assortment of public interest, consumer advocacy, civil rights, and local government organizations are offering spirited defense of policies to ensure that diverse local voices are heard. Key issues of the day are: public interest set-asides of bandwidth and spectrum; secure and independent funding for local noncommercial media; universal service (especially anti-red-lining); and related consumer protection and civil rights concerns including privacy, nondiscrimination, customer service, equal employment opportunity, and free speech.

Leveraging profits in the legislative arena

The current legislative backdrop is an ongoing corporate assault against local control and public interest media regulation at local, state and national levels. In the heavily financed lobbying frenzy, Congress has reached a critical point, poised to act irresponsibly. Current proposals to rewrite US communications laws being considered by Congress would effectively give a few powerful corporations complete control over the information passing into and out of virtually every home in America.

Elected officials and appointed regulators are meant to provide transparent

deliberations and offer direct accountability to the public. For well-established public interest purposes, including consumer protection and public safety, regulatory agencies historically provide needed checks on the market power of monopolies, duopolies, and other forms of restricted competition that occur in a variety of communications media industry sectors.

But in the profiteering rush of media mergers and acquisitions, Congress is being enlisted to deconstruct the policy framework. The predicted outcome is broadband hegemony, including centralized media censorship and control.

As the history of media law and regulation around the world illustrates, transparent regulatory protections are even more important for free and independent media in democratic societies because various forms of media are dealing directly in the marketplace of ideas.

Going forward

Increasingly, community media advocates are identifying public interest concerns not only for cable, but for broadcast, wireless, satellite and internet communications. A common ground is emerging to broaden and re-frame the debate and re-invent the future of media access policy in the public interest. Two framing messages emerge:

Community media are critical social infrastructure worthy of public investment.

Local media access is our best hope to create a free marketplace of ideas.

In its advocacy efforts and calls to action, the Alliance has developed a core message. The values expressed are consistent with the “Bill of Media Rights,” a set of shared policy goals adopted by hundreds of allied organizations in order to advance the cause of community media (see sidebar).


- No people can be free without the freedom to share any information they feel they need to make decisions for self-determination.

“If we’ve learned nothing else in our 30-year history, we’ve learned that whether in the heat of legislative and policy crises or not, education and advocacy around public interest media is a vital part of what we do.”

- The open media green space provided by public, educational and governmental access and other local non-commercial media outlets is a real protection against corporate domination of our communities.
- While private interests should have the freedom to compete and innovate, commercial profits must not be derived at the expense of basic rights to liberty and justice afforded in a democracy.

And yet, even as we hone these messages and mobilize vast constituencies in support of public interest media, we still find that in 2006 the public policies that support community media are losing ground and at extreme risk of collapse. Legislative battles to preserve and support community media are unfolding across the US in local, state and national arenas with massive lobbying assaults funded by industry profiteers.

In response, wider public interest coalitions are forming to work toward shared visions of a media future that gives people a voice in decisions that affect their lives, supports the open sharing of diverse cultural expression, and builds local communities.

Our work continues. If we’ve learned nothing else in our 30-year history, we’ve learned that whether in the heat of legislative and policy crises or not, education and advocacy around public interest media is a vital part of what we do. Having a common and clear message, keeping our communities educated and informed about the issues, and maintaining our strength through numbers are all important in the fight to preserve public media green space. 

Advancing the Cause of Community Media

To advance the cause of community media, hundreds of allied organizations have adopted a “Bill of Media Rights” expressing these shared policy goals:

- Media that provide an uninhibited marketplace of ideas.
- Media that use public airwaves to serve the public interest.
- Media that reflect and respond to their local communities.

Citizens’ Bill of Media Rights is online at: www.citizensmediarights.org

The Alliance’s public policy goals and current calls to action can be found at www.alliancecm.org

Telecommunications Task Force Lessons

by *Steve McMahon*



Steve McMahon chaired the Davis Telecommunications Task Force from 2002-2005, and heads the Davis Community Network's web team. In his remaining time, he makes a living as a web developer.

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[The following case study contains lessons valuable to anyone preparing to enter cable negotiations in today's challenging telecommunications climate.]

EARLY IN FALL 2005, the City of Davis, California concluded a lengthy informal franchise renewal negotiation with the nation's largest cable television provider, Comcast. The resulting agreement was an ugly, compromise document, of which no one could be proud. It does clearly improve on our old franchise — though not as much as we might have hoped — both in its direct benefits to local cable subscribers and in the package of support for the institutional city, its schools, and community media. The best lessons from our franchise renewal process, though, aren't in the franchise agreement or our voluminous community needs assessment. They're in the community partnerships forged and an appreciation of how rapidly the regulatory and economic environment is changing.

The franchise renewal process in Davis took nearly five years. It could have been over much more quickly. Even before receiving a renewal application from AT&T Broadband (Comcast's immediate predecessor in a serial monogamy of cable providers), the City of Davis was preparing to grant the renewal in a quick, administrative process. This was at the height of the telecom bubble, and the City anticipated that an expedited franchise process might encourage one or more competitive franchisees to enter our market. It's hard to remember that optimism without wincing. Even the most pessimistic among us cautioned only that we "might not" attract competitive franchisees, and that without them would have diminished protections and benefits.

In retrospect, I see another — just as serious — problem with a quick franchise process: our community did not

then know what it wanted from a cable franchise and did not have shared goals for our community media. Faced with opposition to its early proposals, the City appointed a Telecommunications Task Force and charged it with determining a process for cable franchise renewal. Only by accident, the task force was composed of representatives from a full set of stakeholders, including the school district, Davis Community Television (DCTV), UC Davis, the Davis Community Network, media activists, and the institutional city itself. With the full encouragement of the City, this task force ended up going far beyond its original mandate and oversaw the entire franchise renewal process. The seven-member task force became the place where competing needs were voiced and compromises (sometimes reluctantly) forged. Every major decision of the task force was made by consensus, and the City Council — assured of our unanimity — accepted our every recommendation without change.

The involvement of a full set of partners was not obviously of benefit to community media. Cable TV in Davis began in the early '80s as a community-organized cooperative, and our old franchise ordinance called for 100% of franchise fees to go toward PEG, and all of the franchise-related capital and equipment funding to go to DCTV. Both the city government and school district entered into the renewal process with the goal of changing that balance. Each wanted more support for their own programming, but more urgently, they desired that the next franchise include a robust, fiber-optic Institutional Network (INET) to connect their sites. If the full cost of that network had been covered by the franchise, it would nearly certainly have meant far less money for PEG capital and equipment. The task force process, though, had committed the partners to addressing the full spectrum of

community communication needs, and it was apparent that a franchise that too strongly subsidized the INET would hinder the PEG channels' ability to face a digital future. Our compromise resulted in most of the cost of the INET being borne by its most direct beneficiaries, while still making it fully available for community media purposes.

The rapid changes in the telecommunications regulatory and economic environment made it all feel like dancing during an earthquake. In retrospect, our negotiations spanned three epochs: 1) the heady era of the telecom bubble, during which a primary concern was laying the groundwork for competition; 2) the "return of the repressed," during which we came to grips with the fact that we would probably have to live with one cable company that had little vision and was winning every regulatory battle; and 3) a period of sudden convergence when the franchisee awoke to the fact that they didn't own the digital future, and we awoke to the fact that our control over the cable right-of-way was far more tenuous than we thought.

The changing terrain can be illustrated in our changing negotiations over 'franchise term.' Five years ago, our old, 15-year franchise seemed absurdly long. We planned on shorter terms to force technology updates, and believed that prospects for competition meant we'd be able to get what we wanted. When prospects for competition disappeared, we found ourselves locked in glacially slow negotiations with a franchisee demanding a 20-year term (we settled on 13). In the final few months, with a state in fiscal crisis considering statewide franchising proposals, we found ourselves wondering if we shouldn't have sought a longer term. Comcast, meanwhile, frightened by the possibility of competition from the Bells, demanded changes that would have allowed them to open fresh franchise renewal negotiations at any time (they didn't get this).

The final twists left me with a belief that the most important thing we had bought, with our years of effort, was breathing room for our community media to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. We

must wrestle with the possibility that the recently signed renewal may be our last; the franchise funds with which our community has built exemplary PEG resources need to be regarded as unreliable. This doesn't mean we won't try to get fair rent from cable operators for use of our right-of-way. But, we're going to start trying to think of the cable franchise as just one of multiple streams of revenue for community media. Likewise, cable subscribers are just one of multiple audiences.

Though Davis has excellent PEG channels, community satisfaction with cable TV has been low, and only about half of homes in a very media savvy community subscribe. By comparison, internet use is nearly ubiquitous. Davis has one of the first, and longest-lived, community networks in the nation. Our city channel and DCTV have already begun to stream programming that was previously only available via cable to internet watchers. Likewise, DCTV has fostered, with great encouragement from all, a low power FM radio station that reaches the entire city. We're trying to think "community media" — and mean it — where we once thought "community television."

Once you start thinking this way, it feels emancipating (though scary); we're not just the neglected children of the current cable franchisee anymore. In the past, moves to stream community media to the internet have met with the objection that they undermine the cable monopoly and risk the flow of benefits from the franchisee. Now, I think it's becoming clear that that flow of benefits is already endangered. That frees us to experiment with alternative ways of reaching — and enabling — our communities. Our first steps may be to seek alternative distribution for the content we're already producing: live internet streams and on-line digital libraries. Next, we may be helping local nonprofits create video blogs documenting their work instead of helping produce 30-minute cable TV programs. But, the larger goal is to keep empowering the local folks who want to use electronic media to reach others. **cMr**

“We must wrestle with the possibility that the recently signed renewal may be our last; the franchise funds with which our community has built exemplary PEG resources need to be regarded as unreliable.”

Deep Focus: The Future of Independent Media

by Andrew Blau



Andrew Blau is a scenario practitioner at Global Business Network, where he helps organizations identify and adapt to the trends and pressures that will shape their future. Much of his current work looks at the future of media and information technologies, as well as the trends shaping philanthropy and the social sector in the US. Once upon a time, he was the Chairman of the Alliance for Community Media.

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GBN's website offers a rich source of materials related to the future of independent media, including:

- **LOOMING SHIFTS IN THE LANDSCAPE: INSIGHTS FROM REMARKABLE PEOPLE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA FIELD**, excerpts of interviews compiled by Peter Leyden.
- **THE NEW NEW MEDIA: A VIRTUAL LEARNING JOURNEY**, by Peter Leyden.

www.gbn.com/independentmedia

[The following excerpt is from DEEP FOCUS: THE FUTURE OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA, a 64-page report released in 2004, culminating a year-long study on independent media and its future in the digital era. See opposite page sidebar for more information.]

INDEPENDENT MEDIA IS THRIVING in the marketplace and in museums, on screens large and small, telling important stories to growing audiences. And as we will see, there is every reason to believe that we are only at the beginning of a decade of surging growth for moving pictures of every kind. Using the internet as their working platform, media makers and distributors will transform the world of motion media as thoroughly in the next decade as the world of print has been reshaped in the last.

Yet in the same period, one of the nation's most respected media arts centers, the Boston Film and Video Foundation, closes for lack of funding; the Carnegie Museum of Art suddenly shuts its film and video program; and public and philanthropic funds for media appear to be in steady decline. Michael Moore, the Oscar-winning director of the most successful documentary of recent times, and so perhaps the best-known independent filmmaker in the country, finds that the Walt Disney Company won't release his most recent work, apparently for political and business reasons. For many in the field,

the opportunities to make and share serious, substantial work seem as rare as ever, maybe rarer, and the economic basis for doing so seems as far away as ever, maybe farther.

The fact that the field is going in both these directions at once suggests this is a story of deep, epochal shifts, where evidence of growth and decline, opportunity and threat, is not contradiction but different parts of the same story. The field is reorganizing, and the flow of resources and attention is reorganizing with it. Some may hope that through hard work and focused strategy they can restore an earlier era's patterns of support, growth, infrastructure, and exhibition. That is more than unlikely; it is not even possible. And yet there is great energy, enthusiasm, interest, and opportunity, which suggests that while the last great era of independents cannot be restored, the next great era for independents is unfolding.

This doesn't mean that the people and organizations that thrived in the last era will be the same ones that thrive again. The challenge will be to adapt to the opportunities and demands that will define this new era. Those who can will both discover and encourage what we believe could be a great time for independent media makers and the themes and values that have defined their work.

Based on our research, the interviews we conducted, and the scenario workshops

“There is a transition well underway toward a new distribution platform, which doesn't happen very often. It will be home for the coming generation of media makers and viewers.”

we led, we have developed our own observations about the environment for independent media in the next decade. These observations may run counter to some current assumptions; some suggest real disruptions to the world of independent media today. We believe, though, that whatever discomfort may come from considering them now will be minor compared to the discomfort of trying to navigate them unprepared.

“[The younger generation has] never existed in a world where mass media exists in the way that we understand it. And they’re much more comfortable making work that is quirky but has a loyal following, rather than trying to make something that will be seen by everyone.”

Clay Shirky
adjunct professor, NYU

from GBN’s LOOMING SHIFTS IN THE LANDSCAPE


We are entering a period of enormous opportunity for media makers of every stripe. It may not be an economic opportunity immediately or directly, but an opportunity to make and move work in unprecedented ways with unprecedented flexibility.

The media landscape will be reshaped by the bottom-up energy of media created by amateurs and hobbyists as a matter of course. The resulting output will overrun the institutions and strategies created to organize and navigate an era of great scarcity of media equipment and products. Images, ideas, news, and points of view will come from everywhere and travel along countless new routes to an ever-growing number of places where it can be viewed. This bottom-up energy will radiate enormous energy and creativity, but it will also tear apart some of the categories that organize the lives and work of media makers.

The internet is the next important platform for media of all kinds. There is a transition well underway toward a new distribution platform, which doesn’t happen very often. It will be home for the coming generation of media makers and viewers. For them, the internet is neither new nor special, just the thing that connects most of their media choices. The internet needn’t be an exclusive commitment for today’s makers or institutions, but it can’t be ignored by those looking

for new opportunities to connect with audiences.

Video on the internet today is where text was in the early ‘90s — about to experience a huge jump in terms of sophistication of use and widespread accessibility, and as a catalyst for experimentation of all kinds. Video is poised for an era of experimentation and opportunity, where it will be made, shared, watched, and quoted in whole new ways.

A new generation of media makers and viewers is emerging, which could lead to a sea-change in how media is made and received. People just entering their 20s are tech-savvy, swimming in connectivity and mobility, blurring the boundaries between producing and consuming media, gaming, and all the while multitasking. The generation born between 1982 and 2000, the Millennials, is as big as the Baby Boom generation, and could easily have as profound an impact on culture and markets as Boomers had as they entered adulthood. But no one should assume they will share their elders’ allegiances, ways of seeing the world, or priorities. This is not to say they won’t care about what those who came before them care about. It is to say they will express it and organize their responses to it in ways that may be quite different from the ones that previous generations built institutions around. 

Deep Focus

In 2003, six San Francisco media organizations — the Bay Area Video Coalition, the Film Arts Foundation, the Independent Television Service, KQED, The National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, and the National Asian American Telecommunications Association — convened to take an in-depth look at the long term future of independent media.

With support from The Rockefeller Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation, The Tides Foundation, and The San Francisco Foundation, they engaged Global Business Network (GBN) in a year-long investigation using external analysis and scenario planning. Andrew Blau presents the findings of this investigation in the report, **DEEP FOCUS: THE FUTURE OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA**.

For more information about this report, or to order a copy, please visit www.namac.org

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION: A NEW GENERATION OF MEDIA MAKERS AND VIEWERS

More Millennials

For more information on the Millennial Generation, visit The New Politics Institute website, www.newpolitics.net/reports/comingamerica

In the NAMAC report, DEEP FOCUS: THE FUTURE OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA, Andrew Blau observes that the Millennial Generation — the generation born between 1982 and 2000 — is “as big as the Baby Boom generation, and could easily have as profound an impact on culture and markets as Boomers had as they entered adulthood.” The result, according to Blau, is a potential “sea-change” in how media is made and received.

“There are things going on that nobody sees except these kids. The web communities that they have! ... it’s a powerful, powerful force for community.”

In a 2004 interview with Global Business Network (GBN), William Strauss, a noted authority on American generations, identified distinctive characteristics of the Millennials’ use of new communication technology:

“The fact that this generation has such tremendous capability at computing and communicating is a big deal. There can be a new movie and the first group in the

theater will be already on their cellphones or using their handhelds to tell the world. Then it goes out on IM and boom, it’s just out there.

“These technologies will begin to be applied in political directions. The tendency of this generation is to re-norm and to adhere around a group consensus. There are things going on that nobody sees except these kids. The web communities that they have! Sometimes they’re very formalized and other times they’re informal, like buddy lists and things, but they get that word out there. And they adhere. And it’s a powerful, powerful force for community.

“They’re walking between classes and they’re making cellphone calls. Their capacity to get information out to lots of people very quickly is enormous. They don’t see the PC as a way for the individual to defy the world — they see it as the tool for building community and for staying in touch with lots of people.”

[Excerpted from LOOMING SHIFTS IN THE LANDSCAPE: INSIGHTS FROM REMARKABLE PEOPLE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA FIELD.]

“Take the young 20-something who doesn’t have cable. He’s a Netflix guy. He has a robust presence on MySpace, he blogs and vlogs and downloads his favorite podcasts. He makes 30-second movies on his cell phone. He’s truly an on-demand kind of guy. Does he recognize his place in the most common identities of community media? Or does he recognize the access center only as a quirky TV station on a cable system he doesn’t watch?”

Laurie Cirivello
executive director
Grand Rapids Community Media Center

The Era of Smart Video

by *Kenyatta Cheese*

TELEVISION IS DOOMED as an apparatus of community conversation. Its point of entry is too small, its filters are too narrow, and as a result, it leaves out a large portion of the population which doesn't have the time or the social and professional connections to have their perspective added to the conversation. The only feedback being collected regularly comes from those with an interest in profiting from the system. How can we as a society expect to make sound decisions when our data are so skewed?

As proponents of community media, none of this should come as news to you; these are the exact reasons why public access was created in the first place. We help people get their foot in the door and have their voices heard. As community organizers, we know that this is only one half of the equation. And it's not until we have people in conversation that organization and collective action can arise.

Broadcast is a one-to-many technology. Access to it is limited by design. You put content in at one end, aim it at a bunch of people and fire. These are not the circumstances under which to hold a conversation.

Our community has known this for quite some time now. While cable subscriptions have been on a steady decline since 2003, the internet is seeing its use increase to include two thirds of adults and 90% of children age 12-17. When these users are online, they're creating content. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 44% of adults and 57% of teens are blogging, videoblogging, podcasting, sharing photos, and posting their own content on a regular basis.¹

Much of this content is poorly annotated. Content posted without proper de-

scription information renders it unreadable by media search services. There is an opportunity for access centers to lend their production expertise toward making user-generated video smarter and searchable.


It's 2006. By now "going digital" should be a given for every access center. If you're not providing your constituents with access to computer-based tools for editing, encoding, and uploading their video to the internet, drop this article, close your office door, and start reassigning the line items in your budget toward a copy of QuickTime Pro and a DSL line.

You don't need sophisticated broadcast tools to distribute video effectively online. Teach users how to make the meaning in their video more explicit to search engines, present their video in ways that promote sharing, and help them connect with their appropriate affinity groups online. Teaching these three concepts will produce better content creators online than an understanding of IRE units ever will.

"It's 2006. By now 'going digital' should be a given for every access center."

For more than 60 years, we've tried to graft conversation onto an outmoded technology designed to disseminate declarations and proclamations to a passive audience. In the meantime, online networks have become more inclusive and video has grown smarter.

Granting individuals access to mass media creation tools is like providing a flashlight in the dark. Giving their work permanence on the internet and making it indexable, searchable, and citable is like lighting up the entire world.

It's about time we all became enlightened. 



Kenyatta Cheese is a researcher and technologist. Currently he works with the Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology. During his off hours he edits unmediated.org, a group blog on decentralized media.

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¹ www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/113/report_display.asp and www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/166/report_display.asp

Section III. The Wisdom That Guides Us

INTRODUCTION: CONTEMPLATING THE WAY FORWARD

IN THIS FINAL SECTION OF *ON BEYOND ACCESS*, we look for wisdom. The previous section identified significant challenges facing the community media field — challenges in policy and legislative arenas, challenges on the ever-evolving technological front, and challenges inherent in serving communities with disparate relationships to media.

So, as the guy on the cover muses, how do we move boldly forward into the future with our mission intact? How do we remain relevant community institutions? Most importantly, what is the role we play in ensuring that media is there for the people in our communities and that *community* is a healthy and significant component of the media landscape?

The articles assembled in this section examine fundamental aspects of who we are as a movement and how we might best set off on a path to the future. **Hans Klein** and **Chuck Sherwood** examine what has worked and what

hasn't, what is good about what we do and how we might evaluate the opportunities ahead. They ask us to take a critical look inward and determine to what degree our services and basic construct effectively serve the mission laid out in section one. **Jay Dedman** offers an alternative construct altogether for media making and media sharing. In this respect, he represents, culturally, a new generation who relates to media in ways vastly different than generations before. **Richard Lowenberg**, an artist, a media practitioner and a long-time media philosopher, suggests we take it all down a notch and think about balancing technological development with environmental, economical, political and cultural considerations. Finally, we conclude by offering an interview with a varied group of media practitioners and thinkers who share their ideas and perspectives on the direction and opportunities of the community media movement. **KAP**

So, What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?



by Chuck Sherwood

HAVING BEEN INVOLVED IN THE PEG access/community media movement for the past thirty years, I want to challenge our leadership to take a look at where we have come from, where we are now, and where we need to head so that we have a future. Of course, there couldn't be a more appropriate time to do this than in 2006. We are now ten years into this new digital and internet age and we have many new options and opportunities.

Let's look first at our technology for training, production and distribution. The migration to digital production technology that began in the mid-nineties is now complete. Most access centers are shooting video with digital cameras and editing using computers with non-linear software. Many access centers are

now using DVDs rather than tape for the cablecasting of programming onto their PEG channels. Some centers are taking the next step to storing programming on media servers that can either cablecast that programming onto channels, be streamed or webcast through the center's website, or downloaded on-demand by viewers. Needless to say, the internet has totally transformed who can view the programming, and how.

As soon as the internet became available, many centers launched websites as a way of having another means for information distribution, and a marketing opportunity for their residents and viewers. With the availability of broadband service, many centers became the first to make their PEG programming available online. For the first time, non-cable subscribers

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could view PEG programming. Additionally, this made programming accessible to anyone in the world with a computer and a high-speed internet connection.

Another new development over the past ten years was the introduction of computer labs, or Community Technology Centers. CTCs came about with the advent of lower cost computers and software, and represented a great partnership and logical first step for PEG centers looking to expand their services and evolve toward “community media centers.” The partnership provided a low cost way for PEG centers to introduce some of the newer computer-based production services

The next big change that centers must accept and understand is the impact — both positive and negative — and opportunities of technological convergence. Once the Telecom Act of '96 was passed, the incumbent cablecos and telcos — as well as their competitors and overbuilders — launched an all-out war. The first-round battles are over and the competitors and overbuilders have been vanquished. We are now witness to, possible casualties of, if not combatants in, the next battles in the current legislative struggles, which are going on in state and federal legislatures. Once the smoke clears, and if we survive and are nimble, we have quite a few new opportunities to deliver PEG programming, using new means of distribution that will be available. There is no reason programming can not be cablecast and webcast to TV, computers, iPods, PDAs, and cell phones, using wireline or wireless networks. Not to mention the opportunities for video distribution that are going to be available using unlicensed digital broadcast spectrum once the FCC completes its deliberations.

So far, I have limited my discussion to good old video. But, about a dozen access centers have also launched low power radio stations over the past five years. Many folks got excited about this opportunity — delayed initially by the resistance of the com-

mercial and public broadcasters, but now reopened by the FCC. Some centers have applied for and received licenses, and have begun broadcasting to their communities. This same programming could also be made available as MP3 files on a center's website for podcasting. Many video programs would also work just as well as podcasts, especially meeting coverage and talk shows.

Remember, access centers are and have always been, as Dirk Koning liked to remind us, about providing “training, tools and transmission.” Our tools these days are digital and our transmission or distribution should be through every means possible.

Beyond the technology, we also need a new, mature vision of who we are and what services we provide in our communities. Access centers have to become community centers that provide multiple community communication services such as community TV, community radio, community computing, community media education, community arts and even community meeting spaces. Access centers have now been recognized as integral players in the creative economy, and through our collaborations with local school districts, colleges and universities, part of the pathways to learning and workforce development effort. Access centers must actively engage in activities and services that contribute to the educational and economic development of our communities. This is a proper vision for the twenty-first century. Let's just hope that we can grow up and survive the political battles ahead so that we can implement this vision. Are you doing your part? **cMr**

Access Centers as Community Centers

Chuck's point that “access centers have to become community centers” is already a reality in some communities. Recently, the city of Roseville, California negotiated a deal that will create a 1,300-square-foot, fully equipped digital television studio, a 16,000 square-foot library, a 5,000-square-foot utility education center and technology lab, and about 3,200 square feet for public meeting rooms.

To read more about Roseville's new access center, go to communitymediareview.org and follow the links to Mark Murphy's article in the CMR archive.

“The Vidiots have finally stopped fighting the digital migration in production, and Geeks have understood the immense opportunities for distribution offered by the Net. But there are others who still resist coming out of the Access Bunker.”

Chuck Sherwood

Public Access Television: An Institutional Analysis

by *Hans Klein*



Hans Klein is associate professor of Public Policy at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. He has served on the board of Cambridge Community Television, has guest-edited CMR, and has advised the City of Atlanta on PEG issues.

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[This article is a summary from PUBLIC ACCESS TELEVISION: AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS. The full paper is available at www.ip3.gatech.edu/]

IN 1984, CONGRESS codified public, educational, and governmental (PEG) access cable television. Perhaps the most daring of these three is public access television, which gives local residents skills, resources, and access to their local cable network. With the passage of two decades, and with hundreds of public access centers operating throughout the US, public access has experienced a process of institutionalization.

In what follows, I offer an institutional critique of public access. I present and analyze six key institutions within public access that influence the behavior of individuals and that condition the possibilities for future innovation. I do so with the hope that it's helpful in making improvements going forward, particularly as so many fundamental elements of our television world are changing.

Mission

Public access television has at least two broad missions: social change and free speech. The differences between these two missions are substantial. The social change mission sees public access in terms of its impacts. Communication is a means to a valued end (positive social change in the service of the public interest). This mission implies that access centers should perform outreach to community groups that will use public access as a tool for social change. The mission also emphasizes audiences, since without an audience, no social change is likely to result.

The free speech mission is less concerned about impacts and audiences. The focus is on training local citizens to produce video, which they distribute over the cable network. Since free speech is an end in itself, an access center can simply provide an "electronic soap box" for public speech; viewers are much less emphasized.

Assessing the social change mission requires identifying instances where public access has changed the lives of people or a community. Assessing the free speech mission requires simply identifying how many individuals and groups produced programming; it does not require further evidence of audience or consequences. (See the section below on pressure groups for a continued discussion of how the above mission issues ultimately impact effect.)

Regulatory framework; government influence

Public access is regulated both at the federal and local level. Federal cable legislation defines the basic parameters for local regulation, and local governments define detailed regulation within those parameters. For access centers, the main regulatory authority is the city or town council.

City councils employ various mechanisms to regulate access television. First, they negotiate the local cable franchise, which determines whether there will be public access, its level of funding, and other parameters. Second, they often subcontract out the operation of an access center to a private corporation, selecting the entity to perform the public access functions. Third, a city council can influence the internal corporate governance of a center (for example, by appointing directors to its board).

These three control mechanisms give a local government considerable control over its access centers. Such control may render centers less aggressive in pursuing their social change mission. Pragmatic station managers may simply accommodate themselves to less controversial programming in order to avoid friction with the municipality on which it so directly depends.

Industry structure affects adoption of new technology and innovation

Public access's industry structure is fragmented. This means a large number of independently managed centers which range in size and funding.

Studies show that most centers are small and underfunded. In 2001, for example, over half of public access centers had budgets under \$200,000, sufficient for supporting only a few staff members and a small facility.

Such fragmentation has numerous consequences. Centers are often too small to be as effective as they would like and they have difficulty affording adequate equipment, staff, and facilities. They may not have enough producers to utilize the channel capacity. Their subscriber base is small, so they may only serve a small audience.

This industry structure also affects the sector's capacity for innovation. With so many centers strapped for funding, they cannot invest in learning about new technology. Opportunities offered by new media may not be seized, since stations are hard-pressed enough in fulfilling their core mission.

In summary, public access's fragmented industry structure means a predominance of cash-strapped entities. They lack resources to do more than focus on their immediate core mission, and they cannot easily invest in experimentation. This may contribute to the sector's slow adoption of new media technology.

Pressure groups impact broader mission

As discussed above, local government officials are a very influential external force on an access center. But there are two other external groups — video producers and television viewers — who have other and very different degrees of influence.

Most access centers experience strong pressure from producers and weak pressure from viewers. Producers are the one group with close and effective ties to the stations, and it is not uncommon to see them providing noisy feedback to station staff. As a result, the stations serve these groups well through training and production support.

In contrast, viewers can be invisible at a center. The typical access center may lack mechanisms for user feedback, so viewers' needs, interests, or experiences may remain unknown. With centers strapped for resources, managers can often do little more than address the most pressing problems, which tend to be the problems of producers. Viewers can suffer neglect.

When assessed against public access's two missions, viewer neglect is only a problem for the social change mission. The free speech mission is fulfilled even if only producers are served. Given the difficulty in involving viewers in station activities, many stations may simply focus on the free speech mission.

Technology impacts audience

Many public access centers use the general term "media" more than the more specific term "video" or "television." Despite such rhetoric, however, the sector is deeply connected to video and cable television technology.

Television is not always optimal for community media purposes for several reasons. First, traditional television production is time-intensive; it's time consuming to learn and master, and time consuming to produce. The inexperienced producer falls back on rudimentary formats and often the programs have relatively low production values. The power of the medium is potentially lost, which has a negative impact on viewership.

Second, traditional television viewing operates in real-time; programming is on at a particular time, and then it is gone. Viewers must adapt their schedule to match the TV schedule. This may affect the size of the potential audience.

Finally, television programming requires a reliable, accessible program guide. Without it, viewers are left to "channel surf." Yet numerous factors make it difficult for many access centers to produce such guides, and without it, few local residents can find programs. The potential audience is further eroded.

In summary, the characteristics of traditional television mean that public access can have difficulty reaching an audience.

“The characteristics of traditional television mean that public access can have difficulty reaching an audience.”

Professional culture and technological conservatism

Culture is notoriously difficult to study and document, but it merits some speculative comments here. When public access was created in the 1970s and 1980s, it attracted a generation of politically progressive activists, who are now in their 40s and 50s. With few similar job opportunities outside of the sector, it appears that the sector has not seen much 'new blood' over the years. In particular, there seem to be few opportunities for younger people to work their way up in the sector.

This may contribute to technological conservatism. The middle-aged managers have relatively little experience with digital technology. Younger people with expertise in the new technology are not in positions of authority where they could promote innovation.

For this reason, the public access sector is best understood in terms of "television"

rather than "media." New digital media are often outside the expertise and experience of a center. The leaders of the public access sector may even see new media as a threat to their prevailing television-based culture.

Conclusions

Progress into the future requires that one first understand the present. This institutional critique can hopefully empower members of the public access community to better understand the forces currently acting on them. The institutions identified here have powerful effects. They lessen public access's capacity to affect social change, and they inhibit the adoption of new community media. Although an institutional critique can generate discomfort, in that it focuses on what works less well in the sector, it can also empower leaders to make changes to improve current practices. **cMr**

Where We're At and Where We're Going

by Jay Dedman



Jay Dedman worked at MNN for the last four years and has recently moved to San Francisco to work full-time with videoblogging.

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TM 32. I worked at Manhattan Neighborhood Network for the past 4 years teaching people how to think about and make TV programming. Before MNN, I cut my teeth writing and producing for local news stations, working up to CNN International in Atlanta. I also worked as a freelance journalist in Africa trying to tell the story from the source.

My experience with mainstream news organizations taught me how information is gathered and distributed around the world through television. Media companies start out with a pile of raw information and strain it down into an easily digestible format. All the work is done for you. I never saw lying, but I did see conscious efforts to leave information out and daily decisions to tell stories from a certain perspective. We can argue all day about their motives, but I think we can all agree that filtering is a reality.

Public access TV is one answer to letting ordinary people get involved in pushing stories into the public eye. At MNN, anyone local can come in off the street, take free classes, and use free equipment to make a show that plays for free on cable TV. How cool is that? MNN has great equipment. We teach more than 60 people per month. Manhattan is a very active community.

So why does public access TV continue to struggle with being marginalized? Why is there such strong ignorance about what public access is and why it exists? Why is it so difficult to gain strong local support? Why do we have only 1 in 10 people in our workshops who actually end up producing a show? Why do we not attract more young people? Why is it so difficult to get people to work together?

I'll give my own opinion here: most people realize that public access TV is

not worth their time and effort. Why? Because they must spend many hours making a half-hour show that plays just a couple times locally on TV, unable to be accessed again.

I see the chance for our TV stations to become *media production and distribution centers*. Let me share some ideas on how to evolve this system.

Decentralize production

We forget to tell people that our equipment is not magic. Remember that public access was vital when TV equipment was not accessible to the general public. We must embrace the fact that consumer equipment is perfect for making TV shows. So why not teach free classes using the equipment that people already own? People can even make video using cheap digital still cameras. This takes the burden off the center to provide *all* the equipment and cuts down on the hassle of producers needing to plan their lives around equipment availability.

Nine hundred of MNN's twelve hundred weekly shows are created by people outside our facilities. This is through no kudos to us. People are making TV independent of us.

Decentralize distribution

Public access has spent years helping people produce TV. Yet, we still control the mechanisms of when and how their show is aired. Now it's possible for people to distribute their own video through broadband internet. We will use the web to trade, archive, and distribute video.

Imagine if I could make a video through the station, giving it to them to play. Even though I lose control of the distribution, I'm still happy to get it aired. But I'll be even happier if the station helps me learn how to post my video on the web, letting me then email the video link to anyone on the planet with an internet connection. I am now in control of my own distribution, worldwide.

Digital Bicycle (digitalbicycle.org) is doing just this. The technology is here. What is lacking is commitment and education on our parts to help evolve community media.

“Nine hundred of MNN's twelve hundred weekly shows are created by people outside our facilities.”

Learn to use the internet the way it was intended

The web was created to connect people. At MNN, we have the internet hooked into all our live studios. I do a weekly show where I beam in friends through iChat or Skype. I talk live to these people around the world using free online software. I am doing now what the networks do with expensive satellite feeds.

We have also done several experiments with on location live shoots using wi-fi. For example, during the Republican National Convention we did a live show from *inside* the convention. All we had was a camera and mic hooked up to an internet connection. We were doing live interviews for free. The hardest thing was getting the permission to get someone inside.

Public access needs archives

Though they are making TV shows, teach people to archive their shows on the web so we can create a shared memory. Two great examples of free online resources for producers archive.org and ourmedia.org. All you have to do is show them how to upload their shows. Let's say someone posts this year's local soccer highlights online. Next year, I can go and grab any of those videos and remix it with a new game I just recorded. Suddenly, our public access station has helped create a memory for the community.

MNN has survived in Manhattan for over 30 years, but we have no real way to prove it. Our archives lie at the bottom of people's closets, or worse, are simply lost. We should use the web to create a lasting memory of the video work being done in our communities. If not, we will never progress. As we all struggle against these Congressional bills, we should counter-attack and demand not only community

Archiving and Sharing Content Through the Internet

The University Channel at Princeton offers videos of public lectures, panels and conferences from universities around the world to TV stations for rebroadcasting. The Channel is building an archive of discussions in academia about the critical public issues of the day: politics, the economy, war, health, media . . . the entire range of public concerns. The archive makes available lectures previously limited to those people in the auditorium or to those who could find the individual university's webstreaming site.

To read more about the University Channel, go to communitymediareview.org and follow the links to Donna Liu's article in the CMR archive.

Using the Internet to Connect Stations

United Stations is a list created to “bring access workers together so we can figure out how to use the web to make our stations into a powerful network.”

To subscribe to the United Stations list, just go to groups.yahoo.com/group/UnitedStations, or, send an email to Jay directly at jay.dedman@gmail.com

channels on cable TV, but also community bandwidth and data storage.

We will attract *and* keep new producers if they know their work will last longer than the couple times it plays on TV. My video web archive becomes my most prized possession and a tool to build a community around. The station can then link to my archives to show the work they’ve helped create. Our city will then have a growing archive of its history online, told by the people who lived it — oral histories, documentation of events and of personalities. Also, when needing to prove our stations’ success, imagine how much more effective thousands of video links will be versus dull usage data.

Talk to each other

As a worker at a public access station, I was continually surprised at the lack of information that flows between stations. I believe the higher-ups are talking... probably sharing experience on how to renew their franchise. As workers, we should share our experiences on running a station, teaching people, dealing with personalities. The group mind can be smarter. Some of us have already started talking on a group called UnitedStations (*see sidebar*).

Local isn’t just your next door neighbor

Anyone who spends time in online communities, specifically blogging, knows that it’s often easier to find more in com-

mon with someone on the other side of the country than with someone in your apartment building.

Why? Because the web helps us categorize and connect by interest.

We must encourage and facilitate our local producers to connect to each other across the country through the web. They will share their personalities, issues, and experience. Let them interview each other *live* through free online video tools like iChat or Skype.

Our website should be a community space. I helped form the video blogging movement in the spring of 2004. It consisted of people posting video to their blogs. Look at the community we have created: vlogmap.org. Though most of us have never met in person, we are a strong community. More and more people connect through the internet. We need to move in this direction.

Corporations have become global.

Communities must become global.

It is our duty to people in our local community to connect them to like-minded individuals elsewhere to get the information they need locally.

I say these things because I love PEG TV. But I also see the complacency and lack of foresight in our stations.

We all want better TV made by our local producers, right? It can be done if we work together and start thinking about what we do differently. **CMR**

SCOUTING TALENT: HIRING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION CMC

AS THE WAYS IN WHICH MESSAGES are created and distributed shifts, CMCs need to expand and augment their traditional tools and methods to serve their communities better. They also need to be better informed about what the community vision and needs are and how information and communication technologies might serve those needs. One of the most effective ways to start incorporating new ways of operating and serving the community is to hire staff members that

embody new visions, views and skills. Once hired, being open to the ideas, energy and new methods they propose will help smooth the transition into a media ecology that is increasingly fragmented, flexible, interactive, conversational and multi-dimensional.

To read more about scouting talent for the next generation CMC, go to communitymediareview.org and follow the links to Felicia Sullivan’s article in the CMR archive.

Slow Tech

by Richard Lowenberg

CALL ME A HERETIC. Maybe I'm just getting old and crotchety. Maybe I can't keep up. Maybe.

But I know that in today's dangerously fragile world, technological progress is rapidly outpacing and out of sync with social progress and development. This is an unsustainable state of affairs.

The networked Information Society is an inexorable part of the larger processes and impacts of ever more rapid technological developments (military, aerospace, energy, biotech, transportation, medical, manufacturing, communications) now affecting every aspect of everyone's lives, everywhere. Technological development may be an evolutionary imperative, the ultimate path and outcomes of which are yet unknown. It seems evident, however, that in terms of the future quality of life on Earth, regardless of one's worldview or beliefs, we are at a serious crisis point. To continue to develop as we are doing denies and undermines all that we as humankind extol about our miraculous intelligence, and puts to serious question our networked social aspirations.

Information technologies and services are currently a key driving force within the development of global capitalism and consumerism. While being applied to real-world problems, technology has been unable to lessen population, poverty, hunger, disease, dislocation, injustice, corruption, or conflict. And, information warfare has become insidious; now being waged continuously, it respects neither borders, nor privacy, nor truth, nor our humanity.

Disparities are increasing. The 'digital divide,' while changing, is continuing to widen, despite well-intentioned technical and social fixes. It is not a technical matter. It is not an easy matter. It will take time.

At best, most of us are just trying to keep up. Innovation and change are proceeding so rapidly and continuously, that

there is no time to stop and to learn from our mistakes anymore. And, learning must be at the purposeful heart of Information Societies' desire to be knowledge-based.

Of course, we can't just stop along our dynamic co-evolutionary path. But taking a lesson from the Slow Food movement, it might be time for us to reconsider our motivations and chart a more intelligent course; to begin to balance the books and make an investment in the Earth for coming generations. For the sake of wisdom, we might deliberately consider learning how to slow down.

Incorporating the best of Information Society development understandings and practices, it is time for globally networked "communities of learning" to dedicatedly collaborate on more environmentally, economically, politically and culturally sustaining re-directions.

Slow Tech is rooted in the following common sense propositions:

- Eco-manufacturing makes sense
- Consuming less makes sense
- Recycling and reuse makes sense
- Open access and standards makes sense
- Local people and places makes sense
- Less noise-to-signal makes sense
- Sometimes doing less makes sense

Slowing down simply makes sense. CMR



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“Innovation and change are proceeding so rapidly and continuously, that there is no time to stop and to learn from our mistakes anymore ... for the sake of wisdom, we might deliberately consider learning how to slow down.”

On Beyond Access



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Daniell Krawczyk is a stay-at-home father (without children) who spends most of his time working on community media technology integration. He has worked at media centers in Grand Rapids, MI and Lowell, MA.

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IN THE INTEREST OF STIMULATING THOUGHT AND IDEAS that build upon the themes explored in this issue, we posed questions to a mix of forward thinking folks in our movement. Some are access pioneers, some are relatively new to our field, and all have interest-

ing and thought-provoking responses to our questions about community media, now and beyond. Excerpts from their responses are presented below; their full answers can be found at www.communitymediareview.org.

What would a world “beyond access” look, feel, or be like?

Richard: Access as a concept speaks to fundamental principles of a democracy and the ability of the citizenry to be sufficiently engaged to sustain the will of the people. So to the original question, beyond television is finding every tool in which community communications systems develop that can be transformed into a tool of the people. When those systems utilize the commons, we have a social obligation to ensure that every person has an opportunity to tap into or generate information onto that system.

Jabari: It would be a digital world where the technologies have converged. In this world all would have access to the tools of digital communications. Moreover, all would have the skills to use the tools and benefit from the information that can be accessed. This would be a multi-cultural world, a wireless world, a nano-technology world. It would be a digitally literate world where information is open, accessible, and empowering — personal empowerment, social empowerment, political empowerment. The goal of the world beyond access is communication, knowledge, mobilization, action, and empowerment.

Felicia: My ideal beyond access world would be one in which our missions were far broader than providing simple access to equipment. Using our resources and skills, community media has the potential to be that public place (not government, not private) that is concerned with the health and growth of our communities.

Hannah: There are tons of video cameras out there, getting easier and easier to use. You can record a video of police brutality on your digital camera and you can bootleg your girlfriend’s new punk band on your cell phone. So we’ll be making more and more content and sending it to our friends, and maybe breaking through to communities outside our individual comfort zones of race, class, family. But the networks we’ll be using to send those messages will be owned by the same companies that are gradually eroding our rights to communicate. Like a lobster in a gradually boiling pot, we’ll depend on these networks to not censor our content, to charge us a fair rate to beam out messages through their lines and satellites, and through the airwaves they’re working hard to own outright.

So even as we all have little devices in our hands that make and send media, if we don’t have access centers to teach us, to plug us into channels of distribution that we can trust, and to politicize us, then we’ll fall asleep. And by the time we wake up, only the richest of the rich — in the US and around the world — will be able to tell their own stories.

Daniell: If we, as a field, wish to move beyond access we would do well to focus on creating new and dynamic ways for community members to interact with us. An example

of alternative interaction is Akaku's XTV where anyone can select a previously digitized program and program it to play in the next available timeslot. But let's take the concept even further. Let's allow community members to sponsor a particular block of airtime instead of a particular series. Let's teach them how to program it from home using their browser and a web cam, mixing national, regional, and local content. Let's connect them into the teeming hordes of unaffiliated media producers, and encourage them to curate as well as create. The technologies that will fuel these alternative interactions are already here (or on their way) but if we don't start developing new policies now, we won't be able to use them to bring in the next generation of members. Though we may be afraid of taking risks, particularly with our channels, the tide is coming in on our biggest threat: cultural irrelevance.

If there were no access centers today, would they be invented? If not, why not? If so, what would they be like?

Elliot: The access center I'd invent has a honkin' big server with a huge pipeline to the internet. Video on demand 24/7. There'd be classes on how to compress and ftp video. There would be staff to help nonprofits produce viral message clips and info clips for their web sites. There would be workshops in digital story production and community mapping (maps of child care centers, giant oak trees, first kiss locations). There'd be classes and support groups for web design, blogging, podcasting, digital photo elements, and MySpace tips. The center would have a low power radio station because audio production is less of a hurdle and cheaper than video production. Local garage bands will bring you CDs. People are more likely to tune in when they can multi-task, or are commuting. And, unlike cable TV, it's free for anyone in town. There would be interns to go out and cover lectures, forums and events, index them, and put them online (and even on cable). There would be plenty of community screenings, though the content might be from anywhere. There would be computers with webcams so that we could converse and problem solve with communities all across the globe. During breaks you could sidle up to the Media Center bar and enjoy some kickass coffee and dark chocolate with only virtual calories.

Richard: New versions of access centers are being invented constantly. The question becomes can we reinvent access centers beyond the centralized content control paradigm or must we leave them behind to invent new structures more suited to the times. Necessity is the mother of invention and we may be too locked into the necessity paradigm of one technology.

Felicia: Given the state of technology, I think we are already seeing the kind of collective spaces that are being created in libraries, art organizations, schools and online. The tools are no longer so expensive and the distribution channels are opening. Dynamic, responsive and flexible are the adjectives that describe many of these emerging media spaces that PEG needs to take note of and work toward.

Jabari: Access centers would be invented today because access centers are where the sense of community is created. Access centers today are needed because many people are still without access to modern technology. Access centers today help build capacity and confidence in individuals interacting with technology for the first time. Individuals will be taught in the access centers of tomorrow that community media are social tools, best used for social ends. Vanity video has become obsolete.

Hannah: Access centers are created in places where access to communications technology is poor. So places where people can get access — whether it be radio stations,



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Hannah Sassaman is a rabble rouser at the Prometheus Radio Project. She recently helped coordinate the successful building of an FCC-licensed emergency radio station used by families displaced by Hurricane Katrina in Houston. She leads workshops on community wireless projects.

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Jabari Simama has, for over 25 years, been a distinctive voice for using technology to serve the public interest. He has been a true champion of the public/private partnership model, and has maintained the simple perspective that the highest use of technology is that which “makes us more human.” He is the vice president of Community Development at Benedict College in Columbia, SC, and the director of the Center for Excellence in Community Development.

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open computer labs, places where kids can make their own music — will always be in demand. They may not be licensed or official, or part of a public movement that can pursue grant funding or advocate for legislative or regulatory change — at first. If revolutionary stations in Mexico and community news centers in Nepal can organize solidarity and support from around the world, even in the face of great political oppression, then we can organize the next generation of the access movement.

Anthony: I believe that access centers would be invented, based on experiences in other parts of the world. What I find most interesting is how local conditions influence the type of development. For example, Bluefields, Nicaragua is an Afro-Indigenous-English city on the Caribbean coast. In their case, there was a lack of any English or Indigenous language programming of any kind — it all came as broadcasts from Managua or Costa Rica or Honduras. It had little cultural relationship to the townspeople of Bluefields. The Belgians provided basic television equipment for a local low-power TV station, and the Canadians provided training. But programming was a combination of pirated commercial programming and local programming. The local programming was all shot by the youth in the community of community events, interviews with locals and coverage of local institutions. Access.

Similarly, in Russia, I saw the development of something called the “Glasnost Booth” — a public “confessional” into which people could anonymously videotape their thoughts about anything political, personal or whatever. This was, at the time, an unheard of development in post-Soviet Russia.

Neither were called access. They were not supported by “The First Amendment.” They were not based on PROW ownership. Access is not based on laws or ownership or permissions. It is based on the need of the people to communicate, the need to process their own lives, and the role these processes play in self-determination. And for this reason, it will always develop, and do so according to the local conditions.

Are we really moving “beyond access” or more specifically beyond “PEG access to cable television?”

Felicia: As a group of organizations, I don’t think we are moving beyond cable television. It seems those organizations that have integrated digital technologies have done so to replace aging equipment resources, but the processes and policies and operations of organizations have not fundamentally changed. Greater interactivity, radically new spaces and places to engage our communities with media (i.e., festivals, online, etc.), and new tools that are more about networks and the internet have yet to be adopted by many as new communications systems rather than replacements for old processes.

Jabari: Access to cable television is still important, but it is not enough. We need access to all converged technologies. The knowledge economy requires that we be familiar with new communication technologies. Many new applications will drive future careers and the economy. Access and literacy will ensure that we don’t have large groups marginalized or obsolete in society.

Are we moving beyond access, or into access in a new or different way?

Felicia: Some of us are, but I see more growth and movement in small groups that are not part of the PEG movement. PEG has a lot to offer in terms of advocating for public discourse, collective good, non-commercialism, free speech, and social relevance that many of the new environments popping up don’t have.

Jabari: We are moving beyond traditional access, but not into access in a different way. Gaining access has always been a fight; access to the new communication technologies is not a major fight because, beyond the internet and computers, no one is raising the question of access to nano-technology or to VoIP telephony. It is important that the public has access to all new communication technologies.

Elliot: It was different in the 80s. Getting on a local cable channel had more impact and more novelty. Over time, fewer groups and more individuals came to produce shows, and we spent more time helping producers recruit crews.

Enter the camcorder, computer editing applications, and of course, the internet. IndyMedia. MySpace. Democracy Now. Ourmedia.org. More often than not, producers target a community of interest that extends beyond the municipal boundaries. They go straight to the internet. When MoveOn put out an email request for homemade PSAs opposing Bush, they got back over 10,000! How many of those were made at access centers?

The digital divide and the problem of many voiceless people are very real and demand social action and facilitation initiatives. But the way most access centers operate, we are not providing the best methods and tools to meet the challenges.

Anthony: When we started, no one knew what access was or would become. No one knew how to operate the equipment. There were no clear rules. There was no trajectory. Three decades later, we have generations of folks who understand this. They better understand and expect communications freedom because of us. Many have their own equipment and we've had to expand our training because of this. But we must always be an available resource for the vast majority who have neither the money nor the exposure to pursue these efforts without help. More importantly, we have a role to play in determining what equipment people pursue because we are the point of first contact. What we train, they buy. We must constantly move them forward toward open, non-proprietary systems.

Finally, we must begin to focus more on development and training in community forms of distribution. These forms must be replicable by individuals and smaller community organizations. We must constantly push community engagement through decentralized communications. There should be no "Beyond Access."

Will the next generation have its own George Stoney? Will it need one?

Sam: I need one now. In some ways I think George was wrong about things — even he admits that — but he did bring us together, united in principles and dedicated to an incredible proposition.

Dirk was on his way to getting it all figured out. I need him more than ever.

But you were asking about the next generation, not us old people. Yes, there will be a new Messiah of the future ways. I think she will be young and bold and so far ahead of her time that it will take some time to recognize her. Maybe she is among us already. We do need someone to lead us. I hope she turns up soon!

Jabari: George was the spiritual head of the access movement, but there were many in the past who built the public access movement and helped to diversify it. The movements that will emerge will be, to an extent, spontaneous. The new technologies democratize leadership and encourages collective action and self-organization.

Richard: Every age and development has its George Stoney. It takes a visionary leader to inspire groups into action. It will require someone, and increasingly we will look toward human leadership to find solutions to the continued need to improve the quality of life.



Richard Turner is a 30-year veteran in the public access and media democracy movement. He has served in numerous capacities from independent producer/director to executive director of some of the largest PEG access centers in the nation.

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Sam Behrend has been a recognized leader in the community media field for over 25 years. He has served on cable television and telecommunications advisory boards in Pittsburgh, PA and Tucson, AZ. He was a founding staff member of Access Tucson in 1984, and has served as its executive director since 1987. He is a consultant with The Buske Group and has served in a variety of leadership positions with the Alliance for Community Media and the Alliance for Communications Democracy.

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“We must begin to focus more on development and training in community forms of distribution. These forms must be replicable by individuals and smaller community organizations. We must constantly push community engagement through decentralized communications. There should be no ‘Beyond Access.’”

Anthony Riddle

Felicia: The next generation will have a collective spirit that is akin to George Stoney. So many new communication environments are about the collective and group. The Open Source software movement is an example of such an environment.

Elliot: George Stoney is a hero because he uses media to add value to our world. He made radio pieces in the 30s, film in the 40s and beyond, video and cable TV in the 70s, etc. He's not attached to a specific medium. He is drawn to story and memory, dialogue and social change. He comes to ACM conferences and brings a video message from an indigenous Amazon tribe that he recorded, or a group of prisoners performing Hamlet, and in so doing he shows us all the myriad nooks and corners of our world where there is poignancy to discover and stories that will make us feel our own humanity. While we owe George a tremendous debt for incubating the public access media center, we owe him more for his ongoing media activism and his life's work as a media craftsman documenting the human spirit. That's the energy I hope to feel in any media center, no matter what kind of equipment or classes it provides.

What do you think people leading access centers today should pay more attention to in the future? What do you think they should let go of?

Felicia: I definitely think access centers need to be more innovative, less rigid, more connected to all in their community, less tech clubs more community centers, more creative and more open. At the same time more rooted in their communities and more inclusive.

Elliot: Access centers ought to leverage their limited staff resources in ways that generate the most programming that is useful and valued. Make a difference! Provide an 'auto-pilot' studio for those who have no crew but want to express themselves. Train interns who will commit to taping and archiving community events. Be visible. Provide simple editing services. Provide an in-house crew. Get internet-related expertise on staff — compression, indexing, web design, Flash, Photoshop. Give storytelling workshops, write grants for projects that will make a difference.

Hannah: We have to fight tooth and nail to build more access stations and keep our franchises thriving, and even though we're starving for money and sometimes getting crushed by the day-to-day of keeping our centers going or our stations on the air, we have to anticipate how new technologies will change the way people plug into their communities. That means making our centers into places to learn computer skills, places that host community radio stations, places with sister stations around the country and around the world. Access centers across the country are looking for other ways to get the shows they produce out into the world, and to get new people into their studios. If we centralize operations we'll be harder to kill. We should turn our stations and our centers into community media hubs, to make it easier to make media, train our neighbors, reach out beyond our borders, and fight the policies keeping us from speaking out.

Jabari: Access center leaders should relay to participants that television is a social medium that allows social communications to occur. The questions of audience and message must be taken far more seriously. They help users focus on adapting their messages to multiple outlets. Access center leaders must also focus on sustainability because of decreases and in some cases the elimination of traditional sources of PEG funding. What will probably not survive in the future is the notion of the first-come, first-served right to utilize communication technology regardless of the social relevance or significance of the message. Self-indulgent media may not survive. But there will always be a need and place for communication technology used to serve the greater good. **CMR**

Closing Thoughts

MIKE — I SUGGESTED THE THEME of this issue of the CMR to the editorial board way back in July 2005 because I was already seeing the beginnings of significant change that I, as a PEG center coordinator, didn't really know what to do with. Sure, we have always been faced with change — technology marches on, governments get progressive or conservative and people change. But to me it seemed that there was more going on now, that things were much more profound and moving faster than before.

About ten years ago, I wrote an article for a regional newspaper that discussed the origins of PEG (because I could find nothing out there that described this, I had to write it myself). In that article, I discussed the coming together of technology (the Sony porta-pack and the beginnings of cable systems with a lot more promises than programming), the legislative climate (FCC is receptive to, and even mandates PEG for certain systems in the '70s) and the social mood of a society that was extremely divided over the Vietnam war and beginning to look for creative ways to get involved and change the world in

positive ways. I said then that the coming together of these three diverse phenomena brought us the notion of access to the most culturally significant mode of mass communication of the time. In other words, brought us PEG.

Sound familiar?

So here we are again, and with the same three phenomena converging to turn our world upside down. Once again, these changes are profound and significant and maybe in ten years someone will write about how they converged to form this, or force that, or cause the next great thing.

We've looked at the current situation and identified and examined trends and possibilities; what we didn't do (and what I had really hoped to see starting out) was some notion of how to get our centers from here to there. A step-by-step, if you will. But, that is one thing that we can't — no one can — do for you. That is the really hard part, and it has to be up to your center, your people and your unique situation. I wish you, and me, and all of us luck as we make the change. **MAK**



KARI — WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO CO-EDIT an issue of Community Media Review on the future of our field arose last Summer, I jumped on it. It was the perfect venue for sorting out the changes that face us, and for trying to articulate the promise of the future.

It had been a significant year — professionally for me, and in our field. Dirk Koning's death sparked anew an examination of the future, since his vision had always been so incredibly forward thinking, and since we were also at what appeared to be a critical crossroads. There seemed to be a growing feeling of both exhilaration and anxiety about the forces of change.

In this issue, we tried to get our hands around those major forces of change, and ended up characterizing them as technological, legislative and cultural. In our field, technological changes are the norm and legislative challenges are a fact of life. Both rock our world in very significant ways, but we just deal, and move on.

But, wow, that cultural thing. That's a big one. I realize it's a gross oversimplification to try and lump myriad cultural influences together and call them, collectively, "factor #3." That's the stuff of dissertations and worthy of extensive examination. But for purposes of this very abbreviated discussion in a 48-page issue of CMR, let's just say that the cultural factors raised here are significant. I think of them as the elephant in the room.

There is a sea-change in how people are relating to media — not for us Boomers necessarily, but most certainly for the upcoming Millennial Generation. The evolution of technology will have profound effects on how people use media, and alters, therefore, our role as community media practitioners. That is the obvious bottom line. And if we don't figure out how to adapt to that world, we will become absolutely irrelevant. In researching this issue, it all boiled down to that.

In articulating this message, we sought the historical perspectives of veterans in our field, as well as the fresh perspectives of digital media adopters. Our goal was to provide diverse perspectives, at least as regards technological and historical orientation, and as a result, this issue reflects disparate approaches to emerging trends. Unfortunately, it does not do so from other demographic perspectives. The authors (and editors) in this issue are largely white, middle-aged, and male. I regret that, collectively, we failed to provide a broader cultural perspective, and feel that if this issue is deficient in any way, it lacks for the value of that broader voice.

I thank those whom I met over coffee, phoned, emailed, Skyped and IM'd along the way in putting this issue together. It was greatly inspiring and I look forward, to paraphrase the guy on the cover, to figuring out just what the heck it all means anyway. **KAP**

The Last Word

Upcoming CMR Issues

If you have ideas or would like to contribute to these issues, please contact the guest editor(s):

Alliance for Community Media 30th Anniversary Issue

Tim Goodwin (Goodwin@usxchange.net)

ACM Boston Post-Conference Issue

Margie Nicholson (mnicholson@colum.edu)

World Information Order

Diana Agosta (dagosta@igc.org)



Upcoming Conference

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"Connecting Communities"


Announcing CMR's new editor



THE COMMUNITY MEDIA REVIEW board and the Alliance for Community Media are proud to announce the hiring of Scott E. Alumbaugh to the post of CMR managing editor. Scott assumes the helm following the long and valued tenure of Tim Goodwin, who shepherded CMR through years of exemplary publications.

In choosing Scott for this position, the board considered the depth of Scott's technical and design expertise, combined with his extensive experience in web design and his vision for CMR's online presence.

Scott received his BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz and his JD from UC Davis. Following stints as an attorney, writer, and sailing instructor, Scott has spent the last 6 years as owner of Sea Dog Designs, specializing in web, print and graphic design. He's received several design awards and specializes in staying abreast of current media technologies, using new tools and platforms to maximize web function, impact and interactivity.

In addition to Scott's proficiencies in web and print design, he has experience in the PEG access world: Scott spent time as a volunteer and radio programmer at Davis Community Television and its low power radio station, KDRT, producing and podcasting radio shows. He spoke at the Alliance's national conference in Monterey and also recently at the Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network's conference on technology and public interest media policy. Scott understands community media issues and is dedicated to ensuring CMR's role in promoting and advancing the cause. 

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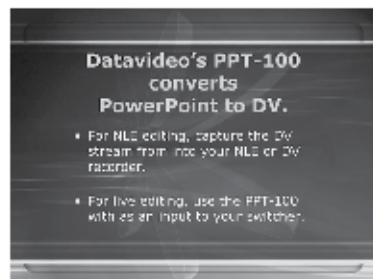
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Paul Congo,
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